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ABSTRACT

Techniques for getting students of English as a second language to communicate in the classroom beginning on the first day are based on a relaxed classroom atmosphere and a well-prepared teacher. First-day activities should be well-planned, clearly presented, and move at a pace that keeps students' attention. The goal is for students to respond with a "yes" or "no" answer at least once during the period, with participation balanced among the students. To avoid the need for teacher note-taking, the period can be tape recorded. Activities that are fun, give equal opportunities for participation, help students lose self-consciousness, move from student to student, and provide encouragement are the most productive. Teachers should be careful not to inquire about students' home governments, occupations, families, or families' occupations, discussion of which could raise students' anxiety levels. Suggested first-day activities include (1) student self-introductions using descriptive adjectives or verbs beginning with their initials; (2) descriptions of students' native countries; (3) mutual interviews and introductions; (4) descriptions and discussions of fabrics; (5) descriptions and discussions of unseen objects and gadgets; (6) guessing games; (7) discussions of new uses for old items; (8) descriptions of typical native toys; (9) descriptions of pictures; and (10) building model towns and farms with blocks, tape, labels, and colored paper. (MSE)

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# GETTING ESL STUDENTS TO STRIP! (Smile, Talk, Relax, Interact, Participate)

TESOL convention paper
45 minute oral presentation
3:00 p.m. Saturday, March 10, 1984

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Good afternoon. I must first ask you: Do you know why you're here? If any have failed to note the subtitle of this paper, then some of you are going to be mighty disappointed -- and the rest of you will no doubt be vastly relieved -- when I point out that the acronym "STRIP" means SMILE, TALK, RELAX, INTERACT and PARTICIPATE.

Getting ESL students to STRIP on the first day usually requires that several factors be in operation. The physical facilities should be as pleasant as possible, and secure from interruption or observation by passers-by. Students should be seated in a circle or semi-circle, or even a double semi-circle -- some arrangement that allows them to face the others, and which gives easy access to the front of the class for the individual presentations.

The teacher should be situated so as to become quickly a part of the group when not speaking. Unless we are doing a radio or telephone simulation (for listening comprehension), all students should be able to see us without difficulty. The teacher should always sit with the group, facing the speaker, when a student is performing. This all begins on the first day.

The teacher ought to be well prepared, and have all the necessary materials at hand. We also need to be time-conscious, so that the pace of the first-day activity and its conclusion will coincide with the duration of the class period. We can always have a few words of preview for the next day's lesson to fill an errant minute, so that the class is not dismissed early or late. In that way, the teacher has set the tone of respect for everyone's time from Day One.

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Another element, the one specifically addressed in this paper, is that first-day activities should be simple, well-planned, clearly presented, and move at a pace that keeps the students' attention. All objectives on the first day must be positive. In later lessons you can use negative or opposite images for contrast. But on the first day, every purpose ought to be upbeat, stimulating, interactive, and conducive to a good feeling in everyone.

The goal is for every student to respond with more than a "Yes" or "No" at least once during the class period. We should strive for a fairly even participation, with no one permitted to dominate or to offer substantially less interaction than the others. The observant teacher who knows at all times where the activity is going will be alert to this kind of unevenness, and will be able to draw out the shy students and reinforce their involvement.

The activities that I will suggest here are not new (I've used or observed many of them myself, and you probably have, too), nor do they pretend to form an exclusive battery of first-day activities for the ESL teacher. Rather, I envision them as a springboard for us all to develop more variations, and additional creative ideas, for future classroom use.

The criterion which seems to me to be important here is that these activities do not depend on any actual knowledge of the United States culture to be effective. On the first day of class, the students don't have to understand our monetary system, or know the cost or value of anything. They don't need to fathom our governmental structure, or our traffic laws, or our fast food establishments. If the activity involves objects, it's immaterial whether the students have ever seen those objects before, or if they happen to understand their traditional uses. Imaginative approaches, rather than factual or literal ones, in most of the activities outlined here are perfectly acceptable--and may even be encouraged as a more desirable option, to promote a lighthearted and accepting atmosphere.

It's equally important that the anxiety level of the classroom on the first day be kept at its lowest possible level. We should ourselves both feel and appear to be good-humored, so that the students can know that laughter and jolliness are okay.

The teacher needs to be free to concentrate on the students during the first-day experience, being ready to interact with them, and anticipating when they need reinforcement and support. Making notes of any kind during the activities will interfere with these purposes. However, we can still make the fullest use of the valuable information about the students that may be gleaned from their participation. The simplest way to accomplish this is to tape record the session. Then we can replay the tape any number of times, thus gaining an early indication of the students' needs for future lessons in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, articulation, etc.

In summary, the purpose of first-day activities is to get the ESL students to STRIP.
If they are to SMILE, the activities must be fun.
If they are to TALK, there must be equal opportunities for each to be heard.
If they are to RELAX, the activities must be absorbing so that the students can lost their self-consciousness in their involvement.
If they are to INTERACT, there must be a moving focus that settles on each student in turn, and sometimes a requirement that student speak to student individually. This requirement removes the scary, voluntary aspect of interactive speech that can be so intimidating in an unfamiliar situation.
And if they are to PARTICIPATE, there must be a reason, a conducive atmosphere, an encouragement, and a reward or reinforcement for the effort.

There are a few specific cautions that I might mention, also. I'd be reluctant to include them, except for the possibility that there may be some inexperienced teachers here today who would appreciate not having to find out everything the hard way.

After introducing the activity in the clearest terms, using simple words that all can understand, the teacher will <u>always</u> model the activity first. The demonstration should be short, understandable and interesting, moving at a pace that doesn't give the students time to decide whether or not they can do it. They should get caught up in, first, comprehending what's expected, and then being motivated to do it themselves. Their own success, especially when it's not preceded by apprehension and emotional tension, will provide for them much of the reward for the experience.

Where there is a mixture of native languages present in the classroom, teachers may note that generally the Far Eastern females are the most shy about participating. Men and women from Europe and the Western Hemisphere tend to be the least reluctant to talk. Young men generally are bolder about using their English than are the older men. American Indians who have been reared on a reservation where there is very little non-traditional experience are also extremely reserved about speaking out in new situations.

This is in no way indicative of the ability or intellect of these individuals, but rather it reflects their own assessment of their competence to use English or to "think American." That's why the first-day activities should encourage the use of imagination, instead of depending on any prior knowledge of the American language or culture. This keeps the interaction fair and equable, and reinforces whatever even the most timid student is able to do.

Of course we all know of many exceptions to the generalizations I just made, but usually on the first day we have to make some kinds of assumptions to get started, because we just have no way of knowing the personalities or background of the individual students. After beginning the activity with a quick demonstration, we will often do well to call on a European or Spanish speaker first, since they are usually less intimidated about speaking to an unfamiliar group. Then an Asian might be called on next, being careful that all the shy ones will not be left until the last. In fact, I would call on one of the most secure speakers last, because they're not likely to increase their anxiety level as time passes, and also that the activity can conclude with a positive, strong participant.

Another caution is to not ask questions about students' native governments, students' occupations, their families, or their families' occupations. The old warning about not mixing talk of foreign politics with language lessons is a valid one, which is too often disregarded, I believe. These are sensitive and sometimes frightening issues for many foreign students, especially those from countries under totalitarian or dictatorship control. Secrecy about such matters is often equated with survival, and they may fear some kind of reporting or judgments to be made by the teacher or other students. Most important for

our purposes, the anxiety level in the classroom could increase substantially -- which is exactly the opposite attitude from what we want to achieve. After we know our students better, we may be able to integrate some of this kind of exchange into our lessons where it's appropriate and not threatening. But the students' desire for privacy should never be encroached upon in our efforts to teach them. And under any conditions, these and other such subjects should be avoided on the first day of class. Our challenge as ESL teachers on this first day is to help the students forget themselves, and forget their worries about succeeding.

I'll now briefly describe some suggested first-day activities. All of them can be used with intermediate or advanced English speakers. I have noted on the handout sheet those exercises that beginning level speakers can probably handle, and I'll mention those as we go along.

And again, although I will not specifically include a phrase to that effect each time, remember that the teacher should always begin by modeling the appropriate behavior for the activity, quickly and clearly.

Where suggested guidelines have been included to stimulate the student presentations, the teacher may want to write these on the board or on a poster, where it will be clearly visible to the speaker, to act as a prompter as the student talks to the class.

THIS IS WHO I AM

In this activity, students will tell their names with an adjective beginning with the same sound. (Ex.: My name is Carl and I am clever.) They will each repeat, in order, all of the preceding names and adjectives, and add their own. When each has had a turn, the teacher will repeat the entire group's names and adjectives.

Variations

Students will tell their names with a verb beginning with the same sound. (Ex.: My name is Ralph and I wrestle.) Students will repeat all that were named before.

Students will tell their names and a food beginning with the same sound. Either first or last names may be used, to match known foods. (Ex.: My name is Pamela and I eat pizza.) Students will repeat all that were named before.

Students will tell their names with a pet animal beginning with the same sound. (Ex.: My name is Andrew and I have a pet alligator.) In the event a student uses a native language name for the animal, it's acceptable and all will repeat it that way.

Beginners will have no difficulty telling their names and native countries, with all repeating those that were named before.

LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT MY COUNTRY

The teacher will put a good, large world map on the wall. Write the students' names on removable stick-on labels, to be put onto the map as each student points out her/his homeland and the specific location of residence within that country. Each student is given a paper, before the presentations begin, with a different question on it. (Ex.: Does your country have mountains? Rivers? Lakes? Desert? What kinds of transportation are common? What wild animals are there? What are some industries? What products are produced that may be sold in America? Is there a food or drink that is a national favorite?)

Each student in turn will tell the others a little bit about the native country. If the speaker does not mention some of the information relating to the questions on the slips of paper, the students with those questions will ask for that information from the speaker.

At the end, the teacher may ask a few of the questions at random about the various countries, to see what the students remembered of the presentations. The student with the question about deserts might be asked to name all the countries that had deserts.

MAY I INTRODUCE YOU

Students are paired, and are given about 10 minutes to question each other for information with which each can introduce the other to the class. Each will then take 3-5 minutes making these introductions. Suggested topics to include: hobbies/ leisure time activities; national country, city, region; favorite American foods; special talents, etc.

If students are related or already well acquainted, the teacher should not pair them for this activity. Where possible, try to pair students from different countries or native languages, to encourage them to use English in their conversation.

Variation for Beginners

Each student will get the name, native country, and birthdate (not age) from one other student, and will introduce him or her to the class. This should not be an exchange between two students only, with each questioning the other. Each student will give this information to only one other student, and then must obtain that information from a different student for the introduction. This assures that each will communicate on a very simple level with two classmates individually, and will then address the group as a whole.

FABULOUS FABRICS

The teacher will bring several pieces of fabric, each about one yard square. There must be enough for each student to select one. They might include patterned cotton, polyester, denim, fake fur, silk, brocade, canvas, vinyl, imitation leather, wool, etc.

Display them all, and then invite the students to each choose one piece of fabric to talk about. Give them a few minutes to organize their thoughts and plan their presentations. The main topic to be discussed will be suggestions for uses of the fabrics. (Students will be eager to volunteer for a turn, so that they will be able to choose the fabric they prefer to discuss, before someone else does.)

Beginners can enjoy this activity, although they won't have as wide a vocabulary as the more advanced students.

THE THINGAMABOB

In a large bag have a number of objects (one for each student, plus the teacher), things that are somewhat uncommon or specialized for use in the home or workplace. Without looking into the bag, each student will select an item. After a few minutes' consideration of it, each in turn will tell the class how they would use that item, and where.

It's unimportant whether the students happen to know what purpose the item is literally intended to fulfill. The teacher can even demonstrate this in the modeling, using a clearly fanciful approach. A few of the students will also tend toward the humorous aspect in their presentations. This encourages a lighthearted reaction from the class, and breaks the ice for the more timid students.

The teacher should not volunteer the correct name and function for the objects, unless the students ask for the information. Then the teacher might follow the brief explanation with a reinforcing comment, such as: "But I really liked Tanya's suggestion about the three-dimensional cookie cutter much better!"

GUESS WHAT I'VE GOT

Have an assortment of fairly common, easily identifiable objects, each in a separate, closed bag. Each student choosesa bag (without knowing what's inside). After looking at the item without taking it out (so the others won't see it), each will tell the class one bit of information about the item (such as size or color). Then the other students must ask questions, trying to discover from the demonstrator's answers what the object is. Beginners can often handle this one without trouble.

Variation

Bring small bags, each containing a different fruit or vegetable. Each student chooses a bag, then describes the food item to the class. Other students ask questions and guess what the food is.

If the student is unfamiliar with the fruit or vegetable chosen, the teacher can take him or her aside and explain briefly the name and something about it.

NEW USES FOR OLD THINGS

The teacher will display a number of items that are considered discards -- one for each student and the teacher. For example, there might be an old leather shoe, one earring, an old newspaper, a tennis racket with no strings, a butterfly net with a hole in it, etc. (Be sure that everything is clean to handle.)

Let the students look at the items, then each will choose one to talk about to the class. Each in turn will describe the uses to which the object can yet be put, any modifications that could be made to create a more useful object, etc.

The initial demonstration by the teacher should be inventive and humorous. Also, the teacher should have in mind at least one such use for each object, in case a student requests help.

TOYS INTERNATIONAL

Ask each student to describe a typical child's toy in her/his native country. Suggested guidelines for the presentations might include: age appeal, materials from which the toy is made, whether it is usually homemade or commercially manufactored, typical colors, whether it's enjoyed more by boys or girls or both, and if it is a type of an adult object (ex.: a kite is not, but a toy automobile is).

Beginners will enjoy this activity.

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

Display an action picture before the class so that all can view it easily. There should be some situation portrayed that will stimulate discussion and opinions. Suggested discussion questions (led by the teacher):

Who are the people in the picture--relationships, occupations, attitudes?
What are they doing? How are their actions affecting the others?
Where is the setting? Is it a city, countryside, small town?
When is this occurring (modern, recent past, historical time)?
Why do you think they are doing what they're doing? What led up to the actions?
What do you think will happen after the activities we see in this picture?

SAMPLE "SITUATION PICTURE" FOR USE WITH "WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?" ACTIVITY.

# GETTING ESL STUDENTS TO STRIP! (Smile, Talk, Relax, Interact, Participate)

## Preparations, goals, objectives, purposes and challenges for the teacher on the first day of ESL class:

Make all objectives positive.

Encourage imaginative approaches in student participation.

Maintain a smooth, lively pace throughout the session.

Model all behaviors clearly and quickly.

Be supportive and reinforcing, not dominating or instructive.

Help students forget themselves and reduce their anxieties.

## Some first day activities:

This Is Who I Am (with variations)*

Let Me Tell You About My Country

May I Introduce You (with variation)*

Fabulous Fabrics*

The Thingamabob

Guess What I've Got (with variation)*

New Uses For Old Things

Toys International*

What's Going On Here?

Let's Build A Model Town

Let's Build A Model Farm*

*Appropriate for beginning ESL students





[Roberta Chock ... 3-10-84]

LET'S BUILD A MODEL TOWN

This activity is probably best for groups of 12 or fewer.

The teacher will provide the following materials:

wood blocks of suggested relative sizes and colors
masking tape (for streets and roads)
stick-on labels (removable) to identify the uses of the blocks
marking pens (for the labels)
construction paper and scissors (especially blue and green, and other colors as desired) to create pools, parks, etc.

suggested colors for blocks:
red and brown = public buildings
white = houses, apartment buildings
black = vehicles
blue and yellow = people (colors to indicate male, female)
green = trees and bushes

The students will gather around a table large enough to arrange the materials into the model town. All materials should be at hand when the activity starts. As they become interested in deciding what structures should be in the town, and how they should be arranged, the students will find themselves interacting verbally. As they get caught up in the creative aspects of the activity, they tend to forget their shyness.

If one or two begin to dominate the activity, the teacher can specifically ask other students where they think the hospital or the post office would fit best in the town, and will then label the blocks and place them in that location. The teacher is responsible to make the labels and stick them on the wood blocks as the students assemble the town.

This activity can easily occupy the entire class period, assuming the teacher has enough materials for the students to manipulate. It can become as elaborate as desired or as time permits, with the students using colored marking pens for flower beds, street lights, etc.

The teacher can lend more importance to the activity by having a short discussion about the town layout at the end of the session. This would consist of positive

comments on the students' creative efforts. The teacher could also bring a camera to take a picture of the final product, so the students can feel that their product would not be totally destroyed once the class period ends.

If the teacher sees a real lack of comprehension as to typical city planning (for example, if they put a hospital next to a car repair shop, or a school house beside a railroad), no mention should be made of it during the activity. Later on, however, this kind of information can be incorporated into culture lessons, so that students may at some point in the course become aware of these spatial details in connection with American municipalities.

Since this activity is handled in a non-instructive way, it's a good first-day activity. But the blocks and other materials need not be stored away until the beginning of the next term. They can be used from time to time to illustrate (for example) the layout of a supermarket, or a department store. To prepare for this, of course, the teacher will need to comprehend how stores are arranged for merchandising purposes. The objective would be to give foreign students important clues to understanding how to successfully shop in American businesses.

Realizing that the wood blocks can have a multiplicity of purposes in their class instruction should encourage teachers to prepare such a collection for use in first-day activities.

LET'S BUILD A MODEL FARM

Beginners can have fun with this, and it's especially good for children of any age and language level. But it also appeals to older students, who will see in the activity the same spatial and architectural challenge that's found in the model town construction.

Use the wood blocks from the collection, masking tape for roads and boundaries, stick-on labels, marking pens, colored construction paper and scissors (for fields, pastures, corrals, yards, gardens, lakes, etc.). Small children may find

crayons safer to handle than marking pens. Students will gather around a table large enough to arrange the materials. The teacher responsibility and function will be the same as noted in the MODEL TOWN activity.

suggested colors for blocks:
brown = animals
red = outbuildings
white = houses, bunkhouses
black = farm machinery, windmill
blue and yellow = people (colors to indicate male, female)
green = trees and bushes

These are all of the activities there was time to discuss in this paper. I've tried to include a spectrum of approaches, expecting only to "light your fire" so that your own creativity will be stimulated to an even greater extent than it already is.

ESL teachers have a very real challenge to create a warm, supportive, innovative, happy atmosphere for their students, from the day they begin a course of English language study.

I presume that we have all, at some time in our adult lives, embarked upon the study of a foreign language. We ought not to forget, ever, how we felt as we faced the proposition of climbing that steep, unfriendly mountain, with all of its treacherous chasms of irregular verbs, its slick vocabulary sidewalls devoid of familiar handholds, and pierced throughout with mysterious tunnels and caves of tense and gender and case.

Then lets translate our empathetic memories into reinforcing activities, making every effort to smooth out the rough spots for our students, so that this can be as non-stressful and positive an experience as we can possibly make it for them.

On that very first day, let's get those ESL students to STRIP!

[Audience questions or comments if there is time.]